Howkins, A., Dudley, M., Coates, P., Badcoe, T., Brice, S., Flack, A., Haines, D., Merchant, P., Publicover, L., Stone, R., & Would, A. (2019). An excursion in the environmental humanities: some thoughts on fieldwork, collaboration, and disciplinary identity following a day trip to the Island of Lundy. *Green Letters*, *23*(1), 39-53. https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2019.1593211

An Excursion in the Environmental Humanities: some thoughts on fieldwork, collaboration, and disciplinary identity following a day trip to the Island of Lundy

Abstract

In summer 2018, members of the University of Bristol's Centre for Environmental Humanities made a day trip to the Island of Lundy in the Bristol Channel. In this collectively-produced article participants from this trip reflect on the encounter with the island, the experience of excursing with colleagues, and the questions that both processes have raised in relation to our scholarly identities. In keeping with recent scholarship in the environmental humanities we make a case for the importance of visiting the places we study, even for just a short period of time. But we also recognize the limitations of fieldwork within the environmental humanities and suggest that the process of community building is often just as important as the additional insights gained from visiting a place. Our trip to Lundy involved the double excursion of geographical and disciplinary travel from home. Without really intending it, our choice of an island location helped to create connections between the physical and intellectual elements of our journey. Going to Lundy encouraged us to reflect on questions of boundedness and connectedness; identity and belonging; isolation and community; and how disciplinary habits both frame and unsettle our responses to a new place. This might be characterized as an exercise in provocative dis-location.

Introduction

On a warm July day in the middle of Britain's summer 'heatwave' of 2018, fifteen members of the University of Bristol's Centre for Environmental Humanities made a day trip to the Island of Lundy (FIGURE 1). Participants came from various career stages and a number of fields associated with the environmental humanities including history, art history, literature, languages, and cultural geography. Getting to the Island involved driving to the seaside town of Ilfracombe on the north coast of Devon, staying overnight, and then boarding the morning sailing of the MS *Oldenburg*. Lundy is twelve miles from the mainland across the Bristol Channel, but given the relatively slow speed of the aging ferry the crossing takes around two hours. The island itself is three miles long and half a mile wide. The ferry timetable allowed us four hours on the island, which gave enough time to walk around its southern half before enjoying a late lunch in the island's pub (and, for three of us, a quick swim alongside a friendly seal). We then boarded MS *Oldenburg* for the late afternoon return, before carpooling back to Bristol.

The aim of our excursion was purposefully vague. We wanted to see how scholars from different branches of the environmental humanities would respond to an island landscape that was largely new to all of us. We had no Lundy experts, and no guide. We also saw the trip as a community-building opportunity for our Centre for Environmental Humanities, with the summer vacation giving us a chance to spend time together outside our usual university setting. We wanted to find out happens when collaborative discussions and shared experiences take place in the field, in a place that the tourist brochures characterize as 'a world away' from everyday life. Although none of us was actively researching Lundy, the island was not exactly a neutral space in terms of participants' research interests. All of us brought our own personal and academic backgrounds, and these shaped the way we experienced and understood the island. Yet going and being there constituted a provocative dis-location. The trip was loosely modelled on earlier humanities field trips that several of us had taken part in, and on the WEST and Cascadia environmental history workshops that take place at scientific research stations in the US West (Coates, Moon, and Warde 2016; Brazier 2016). But the trip was also tailored to our time constraints and Centre's financial limitations: a day trip was relatively easy to plan and carry out, whereas a longer trip would have been considerably more expensive and more complicated.

In reflecting on our trip both during the day and after getting back to Bristol we found ourselves asking questions of broader relevance to the environmental humanities. Acknowledging, initially somewhat reluctantly, that our day on Lundy was an 'excursion' rather than a 'field trip' raised questions about the value of such an experience. What did we learn from visiting the island as (mere) day trippers? Would it have been better for us to have spent longer there? Were we hesitant to call this an excursion because we anticipated the charge of lightweight academic tourism, a pleasure cruise masquerading as an intellectual journey? These questions relate to the broader issue of the value of fieldwork in the environmental humanities: how much importance should we assign to visiting the places we study? What can visiting a place – not necessarily Lundy or any other small island – teach us that studying it from a distance cannot? Although Lundy was our study site for this particular day, we found that many of the insights that most interested us were of a much broader nature, raising questions about the relationship between specificity and generality within the environmental humanities. Given our disciplinary diversity and different backgrounds, it is perhaps inevitable that the members of our group should address these various questions in different ways.

As well as offering different perspectives on the role of field experience, the group's interdisciplinarity also offers an opportunity for thinking more broadly about collaboration and academic identity within the environmental humanities. How do we go about collaborative work, both as individuals working in, across and between disciplines and as research clusters that bring together shared interests and research questions? Although the trip was deliberately planned to bring together scholars at Bristol University (and beyond) working in the environmental humanities, the majority of participants would probably not identify this emerging

field as our primary academic home. This sense of academic exploration encouraged us to ask what can be learned from our shared experience. From considering the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration, it is only a short step to asking what it means to work within the environmental humanities and what the field as a whole can offer. How does an interdisciplinary identity, and mission, function in an academic world still organized along disciplinary lines? These questions are, to an extent, about scale: how do individuals and their work relate to larger structures (be they universities, or international networks)? And how does participation in 'the environmental humanities' scale down to the work we do, people we talk to, and places we find ourselves in during our day-to-day working lives?

Methodological concerns about fieldwork, collaboration, and disciplinary identity have all been addressed before by scholars in the environmental humanities, often as part of an attempt to define the field. Mission statements, manifestos and scholarly articles endeavour to pin down its aims and approaches, often for a non-humanities audience (e.g. scientists we may want to work with) (Holm et al. 2015; Sörlin 2012; Emmett and Zelko 2014). Our Centre, too, offers a brief soundbite of what the environmental humanities are, for visitors to our website (https://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/research/centres/environmental-humanities/). Reflections on our excursion to Lundy offer a chance to extend these discussions. Not only does our trip provide a tangible example of what can be learned from going into the field, even for just a short period. It also offers an opportunity to reflect on a shared experience that can highlight both commonalities and differences in the ways we understood our visit and what we learned about the island and about our scholarly perspectives. A couple of weeks after returning all fifteen participants were invited to contribute short (ideally less than 1000 words) reflections on their experiences of visiting Lundy based very loosely on the following questions:

- What did you take with you (from a personal and scholarly perspective)?
- What did you take away (from a personal and scholarly perspective)?
- Reflect on this trip as an 'excursion.' Was having four hours on the island enough time?

Eleven participants (this article's authors) submitted responses. Three of us (the first three authors) then read through these responses and incorporated the insights into this collective reflection before sharing a draft with the rest of the contributors for comments and edits.

What we took with us

In our individual reflections we speak in some depth about how our research accompanied us on our trip. The reflections of one of us working on early modern literature, for example, are punctuated with literary texts. 'I took with me the memory of a handful of lines of poetry, some thinking I've been doing about the privileged role of islands in imaginative literature, and an interest in the navigational techniques of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.' Lundy is

mentioned, for instance, by the poet and planter Edmund Spenser, who recalls the experience of approaching England, from Ireland (Spenser 1999):

> We *Lunday* passe; by that same name is ment
> An Island, which the first to west was showne.
> From thence another world of land we kend,
> Floting amid the sea in ieopardie,
> And round about with mightie white rocks hemd,
> Against the seas encroching crueltie.

The perspective of an early modern navigator is used to view Lundy as 'a seamark, or visible navigational object used for orientation, which provides the first glimpse of land for mariners looking to make landfall further along the English coast.' Our research backgrounds inevitably framed the destination, speaking to how our disciplinary orientation informs our ways of seeing the world around us. Though disciplinarity directly informs knowledge production, spending time in the setting of an inter-disciplinary community also prods us to unlearn our epistemologies, shaking us out of our established grooves of thinking in an effort to take on board other modes of investigation. A scholarly excursion can have hybrid qualities somewhere between work and pleasure; we ate fish and chips on the seawall the evening before we sailed, we hiked and swam; but we also discussed our work, and asked each other questions about our research. Leaving our physical academic home, the university, also allowed us an excursion from our own expertise. We did not (could not) jettison our perspectives or our reference points, but neither did we rely on them to shape our impressions or reactions to the place.

We had set no homework prior to our visit. For some, this was a stretch beyond our usual preparations. One of us wrote that '[I] capitulated and read a few things: my first port of call (obviously) was the Wikipedia entry, which fed my wild brassica obsession by informing me that two invertebrates are also endemic, the Lundy cabbage flea beetle and the Lundy cabbage leaf weevil. The Wikipedia entry also confirmed my suspicions that Lundy, like many smaller islands, has been ravaged by rats, as well as by horticultural transplantations such as rhododendron. Next, I consulted Natural England's National Character Area Profile (159) for Lundy (2014). Finally, through J-STOR, I located three short notes (1892, 1892 and 1943) on Lundy's Irish rat (*Mus hibernicus*), a variation on the black rat (*Rattus rattus*).' For this participant, a longstanding interest in the perceived nationality of biota formed the 'heaviest item' in the cultural baggage taken to the island.

Another one of us went to Lundy with an academic background in the study of Latin American cinema and visual culture. Given the largely (although not exclusively) Anglophone nature of the material and the locations studied within the environmental humanities and ocean studies, this trip to an English island raised an intriguing question: 'What, then, could I, as someone who

is investigating the tensions between ecological and territorial conceptions of the sea in contemporary Chilean and Bolivian culture, hope to gain from a short trip to a small island off the north coast of Devon?'. This question is typical of several of us who work on places and processes far removed from Lundy. Another author, with a focus on the environmental history of the polar regions, reflected: 'in one sense, the cold, snow, and ice of Arctic and Antarctica are a world away from visiting Lundy on a calm, sunny day in early July.' But even the scholars of the most distant places took with us a desire to find points of connection between the geographically distant, and the apparently unconnected local: 'Quite a bit of my time in Antarctica has been spent working on tourist ships and many of the places we visited along the Antarctic Peninsula were islands of a similar size to Lundy. Like Lundy, one of the major attractions for tourists in Antarctica is the wildlife, with seals and other marine mammals visible in both locations and Lundy Puffins substituting for Antarctic penguins'.

As well as those who approached Lundy with memories of field work in far away, ostensibly unrelated places, our group included people who work on environments and communities much closer to our destination. From early modern pirates who used Lundy as a store for plunder to the river Severn's enviro-technical transformations, several of us had worked on the waters around Lundy, if never on the island itself. Although not having set foot on the island prior to the trip, one of us was familiar with its early seventeenth-century description by Michael Drayton, who conjured visions of rivers (including the Severn) as ruling monarchs and Lundy as a nymph to be desired and possessed (Drayton 1612):

> This *Lundy* is a Nymph to idle toyes inclin'd;
> And, all on pleasure set, doth whollie give her mind
> To see upon her shores her Fowle and Conies fed,
> And wantonlie to hatch the Birds of *Ganimed*.
> Of trafique or returne shee never taketh care:
> Not provident of pelfe, as many Ilands are:
> A lustie black-brow'd Girle, with forehead broad and hie,
> That often had bewitcht the Sea-gods with her eye.
> Of all the In-laid Iles her Soveraigne *Seuerne* keepes,
> That bathe their amorous breasts within her secret Deepes
> (To love her *Barry* much and *Silly* though shee seeme,
> The *Flat Holme* and the *Steepe* as likewise to esteeme)
> This noblest *British* Nymph yet likes her *Lundy* best,
> And to great *Neptunes* grace preferres before the rest.

Lundy lacks the presence of indigenous people that is usually integral to the colonialist narrative of islands as places of conquest and appropriation, typically associated with islands in the Caribbean and tropical Pacific. Drayton's description, however, bears the familiar hallmarks of a

gendered and exoticized site of imperial exploitation. Drayton's vision of Lundy also resonates with the more recent archipelagic approach to island studies – an island-centred perspective that emphasizes the connections between islands rather than their distance from, peripherality and subordination to the mainland places that really matter (DeLoughrey 2001; Stratford et al. 2011; Stratford 2013). Unusually, Drayton places Lundy in the archipelagraphic, relational context of fellow – even smaller - islands within the Severn 'Sea': Barry, Flat Holm and Steep Holm.

Drayton also comments that Lundy is notable for its faunal fecundity, and is rather indifferent to the value of traffic and trade (FIGURE 2). The emphasis on animal abundance continues in the tourist literature of today, available on Ilfracombe quay, on the boat, and online, that highlights the strong likelihood of spying puffins, seals and dolphins. Lundy's status as the UK's first Marine Conservation Zone ensures that marine traffic is restricted solely to tourist boats. The Landmark Trust, the conservation charity which manages the island and rents its buildings as holiday accommodation, describes Lundy as 'in the hubbub of the modern world... a place apart, peaceful and unspoiled'.

The calm sunny sailing to and from the island, punctuated by sightings of the promised dolphins, did little to dispel the image promoted by the tourist literature of an island 'a world away' from everyday life on the mainland. But our reflections at times challenged this separation, and we were aware that what we did and how we did it on the island was shaped by our backgrounds and what we took with us. Lundy wasn't completely strange and cut-off; we'd brought prior interests, tidbits of knowledge, and maps picked up on the crossing which revealed more than expected. Despite its particularity, being on the island helped us to think harder about notions of remoteness, distance, islandness, wildness, connection and disconnection.

What we did and how we felt while we were there

For many of us, Lundy's eponymous puffins were the big draw offshore. So finding them became the overriding objective of our walk on this sunny July day ('an animal pot of gold,' one of us wrote, 'at the end of a rather hot rainbow'). Even if less susceptible to the hegemonic 'pull of the puffins', there were certain things 'we had come looking for'. These included the rather grandly named geological feature, The Earthquake (found), a place to swim (found) and the indigenous cabbage (not found). In these ways, 'we were each laying claim to the island…and [mostly] finding "our" piece of it'.

One of us with current research concerning the political and social impacts of earthquakes in the Himalayas became most interested in locating The Earthquake after learning about this feature from the map available on the boat. A description of the Himalayas as a region of 'frequent, and often severe, seismicity' hardly applies to Lundy. Nonetheless, despite the blatant difference in

scale, The Earthquake did not disappoint. Regardless of whether its origins lie in 1755 (the year of the Great Lisbon Earthquake) or much earlier (or has nothing to do with tectonic activity):

> coming face-to-(rock)-face with [the fissures] highlighted to me the limits of my training as an environmental humanities scholar. Landscape can force our perceptions of the past to collapse into the present: standing atop the towers of rock, I could imagine that I was seeing down through deep time to the island's ancient geological heart. But in the moment, confronted with the bare fact of the cracks, I could do little more than marvel, and speculate about their origin.

Others didn't find what we were looking for. One of us, more interested in charismatic flora than fauna (less puffin-centric), felt that Lundy's signature species was vegetable. Only a rather feeble effort was made to actually locate a patch of Lundy's very own wild brassica. After all, on the Landmark Trust map, the clifftop spots where *Coincya wrightii* flourishes (the smothering rhododendron having been mostly grubbed up) are clearly indicated by cabbage-like icons. This lack of determination was attributed to the nature of our visit: had we been on a 'proper' field trip, there would have been the time and the will. Instead, several of us dedicated the last half hour of island time to satisfying the urges of their inner marine mammal (observed, unfazed, by an Atlantic grey seal).

The lived island experience did not always match what we anticipated. We sometimes also had an unexpected experience of significance. For an animal historian, the visit became less about Lundy's hallmark bird and more about 'the discovery and experience of their island habitat'. Seeing puffins (if as a mere speck, through binoculars):

> [was] supposed to be the crescendo, the moment of reward for weary travellers…I was pleased to have found their sanctuary but, frankly, non-plussed about the act of looking at them. Instead, I was struck by the sensation of the breeze across my body, the heat upon my body, the salty smell of the sea far below. It seemed as though it were not the birds that were charismatic here, but rather their home. Their habitat stretching across the waters and up on the cliff tops was charismatic in its capacity to stimulate and excite the sensorium.

Another unforeseen experience stemmed from the long spell of hot, dry weather. One of us from an arts and cultural geography background noted that 'the exposed coastal heathland – usually such a damply familiar habitat - was scorched to a bright gold, and nothing but a dry breeze swept in from the ocean's mouth'. Lundy, in this regard, another noted, represented a 'microcosm of the scorched landscape on the mainland' (and might have added much of the rest of Europe - even the world: so much for the idea of the island as an entity apart). And so, after this insular sliver of global heatscape, the marshy spot encountered inadvertently when we

decided to cut across the island, off trail, to get to the pub before they stopped serving lunch, came as ‘a shock of brilliant green’ in which a highland cow was ‘blissfully soaking itself in the cool mud’.

Despite this verdant damp patch, we realized that Lundy also offers a microcosm of the global water crisis. The island has no surface streams; just a few ponds like the one we stumbled across. Its human residents and livestock rely on rainfall, collected in tanks, and supplemented with borehole extraction from the Lundy aquifer. A few of us noticed the signs at the pub beseeching visitors to use water sparingly. Two customers requested tap water. The barman told them that there wasn’t enough water on the island to simply hand out. Drinking water is only available in plastic bottles imported from the mainland and on that particular day, the pub had run out (fresh supplies had not come over on the ferry). His advice: save water by drinking beer (which many of us did).

Not everyone commented on the experience of being on the island among a group of scholars from multiple backgrounds. But some routinely used ‘we’ and ‘our’, while others assumed a collective desired experience: ‘all of us wanted to see the puffins, and all of us will remember them as one of the highlights’. A few remarked on how productive an experience it was ‘to traverse Lundy as a group’, making collective decisions:

> about where to walk, aided by the pull of intriguing place names such as Dead Cow Point. We shared map reading skills, binoculars and pointed out distant bird life. Through these activities, I met people from other university departments. Conversations about environmental research were helped along by the sound of waves and a view of endless sky.

Group activity was complemented by one-on-one learning:

> I really enjoyed walking around with people who looked at the land in specific ways: who could pick out birds in a way I can’t; who could ‘read’ traces of geological activity or agriculture. It reminded me of being in glorious churches with people who understand religion and/or architecture in a way I don’t.

Some, for instance, were not aware that the island’s eponymous, burrow-nesting puffin colony (like the Manx shearwaters we saw in numbers during the crossing), had been reduced to a parlous condition at the turn of the century by inadvertently introduced brown and black rats, and was back from the brink thanks to a rat eradication programme (Lock 2006).

If Lundy, for some of us, was all about freshly revitalized endemic species like Atlantic puffins, others of us thought it possessed its ‘own exoticness’. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who felt this

way spend their research time in more obviously exotic places like Bolivia, Chile, Nepal, Bhutan and Antarctica. Yet other attributes of the island served to re-familiarize and re-territorialize Lundy. Our Antarctic specialist noted that the permanent population – around twenty – is about the same as the winter population at a medium-sized Antarctic research station. Lundy took its place in a creative confusion of places.

The relationship of the island to the mainland is a core concern for island studies, with efforts rife to de-centre the mainland and destabilize the 'mainland (or continental) perspective'. This was not something that featured in any of our reflections. In fact, for some of us, the island was a chip off the mainland block – a very English, very Devonian island (despite historic debates about whether it belonged to England or Wales), almost an extension of the town that was festooned with English flags (NB. the England soccer team was still in the World Cup when we visited). This non-literal causeway to Ilfracombe raises the question of where Lundy – and the Lundy experience - begins. Whereas some assumed that we were there when we got there, and that being there meant being on the island, others included the journey: 'the four hours on the boat for me were as enjoyable and interesting as the time on the island, so although it would have been great to have more time exploring and walking I was also happy to watch horizons, waves, and coastlines coming in and out of view'. Given that we spent as much time getting there and back as we did on the island (more, in fact, if queuing for the ferry is included), then it seems odd that many reflections did not even mention the journey.

Those who included the journey were certainly less inclined to regard our excursion as having been too short. We were sometimes surprised that it took so long to get there. But, given that the MS *Oldenburg* ('Lundy's own ship') is sixty years old and moves at an unhurried 6 miles per hour, the crossing amounted to 'twelve long, slow miles of sea' – not so enjoyable for the seasick-prone but furnishing 'ample time to think on islands as intrinsically isolated places'. Unsurprisingly, the two of us who study the sea were the keenest to include the journey in our recollections: 'I've been especially interested in fiction and life-writing that considers the moment when the seafarer loses sight of their native land'. References from Byron and Melville in addition to Spenser and Drayton, helped us think about the meaning of the voyage from a literary perspective.

Several of us stretched the Lundy experience to include Ilfracombe (measured in hours, we spent more time there than on the boat and island combined). Though not everyone visiting Ilfracombe is Lundy-bound, the town felt like a gateway to the island, enjoying an almost umbilical connection. Yet Ilfracombe has also become synonymous with a very in-your-face artwork. As we ate our fish and chips at the end of the harbour, where the ferry docks, at the mercy of the seagulls, at sundown the day before, the landward view was dominated by Damien Hirst's massive sculpture, *Verity* (2012). What one of us described as 'a pregnant woman holding aloft a sword, whose body is bisected so as to display her bones, viscera and the foetus she harbours to

th*ose* heading out to sea' provoked plenty of conversation (one journalist had characterized *Verity* as 'arrestingly hideous' and 'comically alien to anything identifiably Ilfracombe') (Bennett 2012). Yet only one of us included her in our recollections. For another of us, the difference in seabirds between Ilfracombe (threatening, mess-creating herring and common gulls, often considered a form of vermin in urban environments) and Lundy (Manx shearwaters and puffins) established an avian line of demarcation between mainland and island.

Given the affinity many of us feel with wilder and remoter places, some felt more at home on Lundy than in Ilfracombe – if not exactly insiders, then definitely not outsiders: 'perhaps there's something about remote places that lend themselves to an easy sense of belonging'. Moreover, it's hard to feel like an outsider on Lundy when practically everyone is a visitor: there's no obvious indigenous presence to complicate responses. Going to and being on Lundy prompted many to ruminate on the qualities of isolation, boundedness and remoteness. One of us who has spent extended periods of time in both the Arctic and Antarctica has had several opportunities to experience 'what I considered to be truly remote places':

> But I'd never really given much thought to a definition of remoteness. Lundy is often described as remote (Natural England 2014), but how does this compare to somewhere like the Falkland Islands, or King George Island, or the McMurdo Dry Valleys? While Lundy is only 12 miles off the coast of Devon, the lack of communications we briefly experienced contrasted to the constant communication that has become normal in the polar regions'.

That interruption in communications refers to mobile phone coverage. The feeling of remoteness and separateness Lundy imparts is doubtless enhanced if you stay overnight. There's no mains electricity between midnight and 6am. There's no street lighting – making the island a de facto dark sky reserve, though this absence of light pollution might make it easier to see the twinkling lights of the mainland – a mainland not visible from Lundy in daylight. Anthropogenic noise pollution is also minimal. None of the 23 holiday let properties has a telephone, radio or TV. And there are few vehicles. So 'natural sounds' predominate.

All understandings of 'remote' and 'isolated' are, self-evidently, cultural constructs. All definitions are contingent. In 2009, for example, in response to an outbreak of avian flu, a Canadian government body (the Remote and Isolated Task Group of the Public Health Network H1N1 Task Force) published the following working definitions:

> Remote: describes a geographical area where a community is located over 350 km from the nearest service centre having year-round road access. Isolated, by the Canadian government definition, means a geographical area that has scheduled flights and good telephone services, but is without year-round road access. Note

that not all homes in a community have phones, and that flights may be cancelled or delayed due to weather.

Though they do not specifically address islands, according to some these criteria, Lundy qualifies: there is a scheduled ferry service for only half the year. We often assume that the more remote somewhere is, the wilder it is. But there's a countervailing tendency of late, typified by Robert Macfarlane's prioritization of the feeling of wildness over a material, quantifiable condition of the wild as geographical area, a feeling that can be accessed from climbing a tree in your back garden or being in your local woodland as well as from somewhere in the northwest of Scotland (or Yukon Territory) (Macfarlane 2017). Understandings of wildness and wild places are complicated further by somewhere like Henderson Island. This tiny atoll in the South Pacific is less than three times the size of Lundy and nearly a hundred kilometres from the nearest inhabited island, which has roughly the same number of permanent inhabitants as Lundy – not to mention nearly 5,000 km from the closest cities. If you want to call Henderson Island wild and remote and isolated or to feel its wildness, remoteness and isolation, then you have to look beyond or close your eyes to the densest concentration of plastic debris on the planet. We talk of getting away from it all by visiting islands like Lundy, but in a throwaway society, there's no such place as 'away'.

Lundy may initially seem like a small island. Once we landed, though, it quickly became clear that unless we marched at breakneck speed, didn't stop to look at anything and forewent lunch, there was little chance of making it all the way to the island's northern tip and back in time to catch the ferry home. Smallness, one participant reflected, is linked to 'seeing edges and tracing beginnings and ends. That helps build a sense of space as finite, and knowable. But after we left, I thought also that that was the fallacy of small islands; they lure us into thinking they are knowable, when in fact they conceal plenty from a casual day-tripper'. Comparatively small - yet comparatively large when placed in the company of other islands in the Bristol Channel - Lundy allowed us to contemplate islandness more keenly than the larger island on which we live.

Conclusion: some things we took away

In making a case for visiting the places we study, one of the most obvious advantages is the experiential quality that goes beyond an intellectual engagement from a distance, and all of our reflections touched on this. It is certainly possible to look at pictures of Lundy in our Bristol offices (or in our Bed and Breakfasts in Ilfracombe), or read accounts of life there, or even to listen to sound recordings of puffins and gulls. With enough research – perhaps combined with direct experience of comparable landscapes – it is possible to 'know' a place without going there (Howkins 2010; Gange 2017). But something is lost. 'A jaunt into the field,' as one of us wrote, 'is never just about looking at the wild world all around. It is always an embodied experience

that stimulates all the senses to greater or lesser extents and that impacts on our bodies in ways that often elude our conscious notice. Journeys into the field remind us to listen, to feel, to take a great snort of the air that engulfs us.'

Interestingly, we found that going as a group in some ways detracted from the experiential side of the trip. Our conversations as we walked around the islands frequently returned to our lives in Bristol, or to our wider research, or to our upcoming holiday and research plans. Yet what we lost in terms of undistracted experience of place was gained from shared insights. Going to Lundy as a group of environmental humanities scholars helped to frame the trip as an intellectual experience, providing an opportunity to learn from the synergies that reside at the heart of the emerging field. Rather than what was taken there and sought for, the exploration of the place itself, and the conversations about what constituted a 'small' island, about remoteness and islandness, opened up possibilities for thinking on these subjects that, appropriately, could not have emerged in intellectual isolation.

The experience of visiting a place includes emotions as well as senses and ideas, and these emotions are often tied up with questions of identity. Whether or not we feel we 'belong' in a place, for example, very much shapes our experience of it. In reading through the reflections, we noted that many of us bought in to, rather than unpicked, Lundy's claim to be a world apart. Our comments were more observant of diversity of wildlife, than of the visiting humans, at least initially. We didn't question the whiteness of Lundy's visitors, for example. Was our easy familiarity in an 'empty' landscape a token of white privilege? At the same time, within our own group, we often assumed a shared experience that didn't exist. We identify as historians, geographers, literary scholars in our professional lives; but carry identities attached to gender, race, class and ability with us no matter where we are. Reflecting on what we take with us, personally, bodily and professionally, raises issues of inclusivity/exclusivity that are pertinent to all academic work and arguably especially so to an emergent field shaped by postcolonialism, feminism, posthumanism, and scholars working outside of western Europe and the United States. Arguably, our personal reflections were in fact notable for the lack of attention paid (for the most part) to these considerations. But several of us did consider these issues. One of our reflections, for example, noted: 'I am an environmental historian. I'm also a sight-impaired person whose eyes don't work as well as they do in other people. When I travel through an environment I'm unfamiliar with, I am usually particularly alive to the multifarious more-than-visual experiences that tend to be drowned out by the dominating provocations of the eye.'

The questions of identity and belonging that we felt in relation to the island of Lundy extend in some ways to our relationship with the environmental humanities and our reflections contained a number of overlaps between the place we were visiting and academic field that was framing our visit. One of us working in the field of English literature, for example, wrote that 'I'm beginning to move into the field of environmental humanities (EH) without quite feeling that I'm in that

field yet (I'm sort of sidling up to it, looking at it askance), and I was interested to see how I'd 'fit in' with the group.' This tentative relationship to the environmental humanities was picked up by another 'occasional visitor to this particular field' who noted 'I am already something of a hybrid practitioner. Cultural geography interests me both because of its emphasis on the relation between matter and ideas, and because it seems happily at home in the awkward and generative interstices between modes of practice and theory. Environmental humanities not only shares something of the same preoccupations, but is itself also an intriguingly kaleidoscopic intellectual field.' Both responses highlight the newness of EH, by asking 'do I want to enter; do I fit'? Asking such questions can reaffirm as well as destabilize our disciplinary identities, as we look for the other literary people in the group, or for fellow geographers (a relevant concern for our Centre, which is dominated by historians), or highlight existing interdisciplinarity in our work. Yet such questions also assume that there is a coherent field to 'fit' into.

Without really planning for it, it is curious that we chose an island to enact our interdisciplinarity. Our Latin Americanist noted, 'etymology is not idle here. There is an island in the history of *isolation*, and the same holds in Spanish, the language in which I work. The word for isolation, *aislamiento*, also has an isle within it (*a-isla-miento*). A recent documentary about Rapa Nui/Easter Island by the Chilean filmmaker Tiziana Panizza, *Tierra sola* [*Solitary Land*], reminds its viewers that the ocean is not always or only a space of connection and flow. It can also be a wall.' As scholars working in the environmental humanities, we can help each other identify the barriers we encounter, personally and professionally. To work interdisciplinarily requires an exploration of the dissonances and disconnects as well as a recognition of shared interests and collective endeavour – not to mention an openness to awkward dislocation as a creative force. The relational organizations of our professional identities – the individual and the group, the Centre and the field – are not fixed, and there are many ways to move within them, considering and, if necessary, challenging our definitions as we do so.

Alongside its sense of isolation, Lundy is very much plugged into the rest of the world in terms of sharing many planet-wide ecological problems: rising temperatures of land and sea, dwindling water supplies, the ubiquity of plastic. Biologists and historians are accustomed to adopting a relational approach to the study of islands, demonstrating a tendency to group them archipelagraphically. They are also inclined to draw connections between islands and mainlands. It has long been recognized that islands can intensify and therefore exemplify the experience of environmental change and degradation (MacArthur and Wilson 2001; Grove 1994), and many of us picked up on this in our reflections. Whether reinforcing or destablizing notions of islandness, connectedness and/or remoteness, dependent on engagement with different literatures, Lundy helped us all think around these subjects and pinpoint those thoughts to a particular place on a particular day.

At a time when the scale of environmental problems is greater than ever and governmental responses can seem, variously, inadequate, inept or ignorant of the rate and scale of the crisis it is easy for us to agree on statements like the one we make on the University of Bristol's Centre for Environmental Humanities web page: 'We recognise that entangled in the environmental issues that face our global community are matters of human behaviour, beliefs, values, and structures; and that critical approaches to human-environment interactions past, present and future, are essential' (https://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/research/centres/environmental-humanities/). What is less universally agreed is how we go about that vital work. As Robert Emmett and David Nye point out, a range of possible approaches is included under the term 'environmental humanities'(Emmett and Nye 2017). Too-strident gatekeeping or policing of what those options are would lead to partisanship, an antithesis to the collaborative, enquiring, and at times experimental nature of the environmental humanities. As an interdisciplinary enterprise, the environmental humanities must be home to multiple ways of working.

In the weeks following our excursion, we felt a heightened awareness of all things Lundy - including rekindled memories of childhood stamp collecting and the sharing of articles we've found about people prominent in the island's recent history (not least 'Union' Jack Hayward, who bought Lundy for £150,000 in 1969 and gave it to the National Trust) and opportunities to participate in organized wildlife tourism (notably companies offering swimming with seals). A trip like this has an afterlife. For us, reflecting on this experience and writing this essay has been a big part of this afterlife (and has helped to prolong it, and made it more than 'just' an excursion). The reflections on our trip reveal that there are no ready answers to the questions about fieldwork, collaboration, and academic identity within the environmental humanities that we raised at the start. Coming from a variety of backgrounds, each of us brought very different things to the island and took different approaches to questions of connectedness, separateness, isolation and remoteness. Reflecting this diversity, we experienced our excursion in individual ways. But despite these differences, we clearly did learn new things from our trip, and that there is a value in 'going there' and experiencing a landscape directly, physically. This sense of learning new things connects to our questions about collaboration and disciplinary identity. Collectively, we hadn't thought particularly carefully beforehand about what we hoped to achieve (or even where we wanted to do and go on the island when we arrived). But in some ways the trip's unstructured and spontaneous nature was part its purpose, identity, appeal and value. As an 'excursion into the environmental humanities,' visiting Lundy helped to build community and provide an opportunity for thinking collectively about a set of questions that hadn't been fully articulated when we set off from Bristol. It might be helpful to think of the constituent disciplinary parts of the environmental humanities as a group of related islands, with an internal network of communications and various island-to-island movements – an academic archipelago, if you like.

Bibliography

Bennett, Catherine. 2012. “Damien Hirst Has Brought Public Art to a New Low.” *The Guardian*, October 21, 2012. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/21/damien-hirst-ilfracombe-public-sculpture.
Brazier, Hayley. 2016. “Practicing in Place: The Environmental History Retreat.” *Environmental History* Field Notes (1). https://environmentalhistory.net/field-notes/2016-brazier/.
Coates, Peter, David Moon, and Paul Warde. 2016. *Local Places, Global Processes by Peter Coates*. Oxford: Windgather Press.
DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. 2001. “‘The Litany of Islands, The Rosary of Archipelagoes’: Caribbean and Pacific Archipelagraphy.” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 32 (1). https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/view/34394.
Drayton, Michael. 1612. “Michael Drayton, ‘The Fourth Song’, in Poly-Olbion, Ed. John Selden (London, 1612), Pp. 55-56.” In *Poly-Olbion*, edited by John Selden, 55–56. London.
Emmett, Robert S., and David E. Nye. 2017. *The Environmental Humanities*. 1 edition. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Emmett, Robert S., and Frank Zelko. 2014. “Minding the Gap: Working Across Disciplines in Environmental Studies.” *Rachel Carson Center Perspectives*, April. https://doi.org/10.5282/rcc/6313.
Gange, David. 2017. “Retracing Trevelyan? Historical Practice and the Archive of the Feet.” *Green Letters* 21 (3): 246–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2017.1390777.
Grove, Richard. 1994. *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Holm, Poul, Joni Adamson, Hsinya Huang, Lars Kirdan, Sally Kitch, Iain McCalman, James Ogude, et al. 2015. “Humanities for the Environment—A Manifesto for Research and Action.” *Humanities* 4 (4): 977–92. https://doi.org/10.3390/h4040977.
Howkins, Adrian. 2010. “Have You Been There? Some Thoughts on (Not) Visiting Antarctica.” *Environmental History* 15: 514–19.
Lock, J. 2006. “Eradication of Brown Rats Rattus Norvegicus and Black Rats Rattus Rattus to Restore Breeding Seabird Populations on Lundy Island, Devon, England.” *Conservation Evidence* 3 (1): 111–113.
MacArthur, Robert H., and Edward O. Wilson. 2001. *The Theory of Island Biogeography*. Revised edition edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Macfarlane, Robert. 2017. *The Wild Places*. 2017 edition edition. Granta Books.
Natural England. 2014. “National Character Area Profile: 159 Lundy.” Natural England - Access to Evidence. 2014. http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/12908251.
Sörlin, Sverker. 2012. “Environmental Humanities: Why Should Biologists Interested in the Environment Take the Humanities Seriously?” *BioScience* 62 (9): 788–89. https://doi.org/10.1525/bio.2012.62.9.2.
Spenser, Edmund. 1999. “Colin Clouts Come Home Againe (1595).” In *Edmund Spenser: The Shorter Poems*, edited by Richard A. McCabe, 270–75. London: Penguin.
Stratford, Elaine. 2013. “The Idea of the Archipelago: Contemplating Island Relations.” *Island Studies Journal* 8 (May): 3–8.
Stratford, Elaine, Baldacchino Godfrey, Elizabeth Mcmahon, Carol Farbotko, and Andrew Harwood. 2011. “Envisioning the Archipelago.” *Island Studies Journal* 6 (November).